PATHFINDERS STAFF MEMBERS - HAVE YOU PROTECTED THEM?  
(PART 1)  
Adventist Risk Management, Inc. | Weekly Newsletter

Providing Risk Management Solutions  for the Seventh-day Adventist® Church

PATHFINDER STAFF MEMBERS
HAVE YOU PROTECTED THEM?  PART 1

By Deena Bartel-Wagner
No ministry leader wants to have an accusation of abuse occur on their watch. This affects the alleged victim, the person who is accused, the staff, and even the entire church. It’s imperative to have policies to protect the children. What is often overlooked is how to protect staff from false accusations.

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Pathfinders Staff Members - Have you Protected Them? (Part 1) – Adventist Risk Management

Check with your local conference youth ministries department for ideas on staff screening. Items that should be included in screening are an interview process, background and reference checks, and membership in the local church for a period of at least six months.

Onsite Activities Guidelines

Most of your activities will take place onsite. The facility where the meetings are held should have:

- Adequate lighting inside and outside the premises.
- Windows in doors of any rooms that are being used for activities. All windows should be uncovered while activities occurring.
- Adults should be assigned to monitor the facilities checking on activities in each location. These safeguards will protect both against abuse and false allegations. Staff Actions and Behavior Staff members should be trained in what is appropriate for interaction with children and teens.
- Suggestive language and teasing should be avoided.
- Never tutor or instruct a Pathfinder privately on an individual basis. Either involve other Pathfinders or have another staff member present.
- Be aware of emotional attachments that can occur. Discourage these. If it becomes a serious matter, the director should reassign the staff member to work with another group.
- Promote Pathfinders to grow emotionally. Don’t encourage them to be dependent on any one staff member.
- Avoid any type of touching or play that could be misinterpreted or used as grounds for accusations. This is extremely important in activities such as playing in swimming pools and other contact sports.
• If a Pathfinder needs first aid or medical care, always have at least two adults present when treatment is being performed.

• Always have at least two adults in a vehicle when attending off-site events.

• At off-site events, adults should never be alone with a single child.

• If the club is attending an off-site or overnight activity, the church board should approve these trips in advance. Remember, adults and Pathfinders must never share a tent or a bed. All overnight activities must have the appropriate number of male and female staff members.

• Adult staff should never discuss personal problems or concerns with Pathfinders.

• Staff should be trained in the appropriate manner to comfort and reassure a Pathfinder. There are times when this is both necessary and appropriate. It should be limited to those situations.

• Physical and verbal abuse is never appropriate.

• Don’t assume that once Pathfinder staff attend training there is no need to repeat it. There should be ongoing training and development in child protection, health and safety, team building, conflict resolution, and skills in working with Pathfinder ministries.

Proper Response to Allegations

Although your club may implement all necessary precautions, it is still possible for accusations to be made. If your church does not have a written policy on how it will respond to alleged abuse, now is the time to ask the church board to formulate one. Adventist Risk Management (ARM) can provide guidance on what this policy should contain —see Model Child Protection Policies. It should contain guidance such as Biblical principles and instruction on appropriate reporting actions in accordance with the laws in your jurisdiction.

It is necessary to be sympathetic to the alleged victim, but it is also important to respect the rights of the individual of inappropriate conduct. Church leadership must take all accusations of abuse or misconduct seriously.
Dealing with abuse allegations requires that the church respond in such a manner that it maintains the integrity and dignity of the church and the individuals directly involved. The church must not forget it has a responsibility to continue to minister to the individual and the family. Church discipline may be required as part of that ministry, as well as spiritual rehabilitation.

With proper training, your Pathfinder staff will be empowered to minister to club members with appropriate methods and in a secure environment.

Watch this webinar for more information on planning a safe trip to Oshkosh for the Camporee.

To be continued... part 2  What To Do?